

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Claims 11-19 now stand in the present application, claim 11 having been amended, and claims 2-5 and 7-10 having been canceled. Reconsideration and favorable action is respectfully requested in view of the above amendments and the following remarks.

In order to expeditiously place this case in condition for allowance, Applicants have amended the claims, as noted above, to be consistent with those claims that have been allowed in the corresponding European application. Accordingly, claim 11 and its dependent claims 12-19 are believed to be in condition for allowance. Applicants will discuss the Examiner's claim rejections with respect to the claims that are remaining in the present case.

The Examiner has rejected claims 11-15 and 19 as being anticipated by Smith et al. Applicants respectfully traverse the rejection.

Applicants' invention is directed to an apparatus for accessing a semi-structured database for purposes of information retrieval. In this aspect, a natural language request is input as a sentence by a user using the input/output device (101). The request is then transferred to a parser (104) which deconstructs the request into its component parts. The component parts are grammatically described, then passed to the slot filler (108) for assigning the components to various slots in a slot-and-filler request. The request is then passed to the query constructor (105) which transforms the request into a database query. The location of relevant items, and eventually the items themselves, are presented to the user in response to the user's query. (See present specification at page 21, line 10 to page 22, line 28.)

Smith discloses an information extraction method to enable a database to be created from a number of text sources, i.e., internal (structured) information and external (unstructured) information (see column 4, lines 16-20). Components or items of information of the internal and external information include attributes and values. An index plan is generated using the items of information, where the index plan has a hierarchical structure based on the attributes and values of the items of information.

Thus, Smith is only concerned with the creation of the database and the index plan. The cited reference simply does not teach or suggest how a user may access information contained in the database after it is created. The Examiner refers to the "research process" in the rejection of claim 11, but this step is performed for the purpose of generating the database in the first instance and has nothing to do with data retrieval.

This is understandable, as Smith is not directed to the problem of searching a database to retrieve any data matching a user request (e.g. a plumber in Ipswich), but to the compilation and indexing of information from a number of different (structured and unstructured) text sources. Any querying or accessing activity is solely concerned with the compilation of the database. Accordingly, claim 11 and dependent claims 12-15 and 19 are not believed to be anticipated by Smith.

The Examiner has also rejected claims 16-18 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Smith et al. in view of Liddy et al. Applicants respectfully traverse the rejection.

Liddy et al. has merely been cited by the Examiner for teaching the further limitations present in dependent claims 16-18. Liddy et al. clearly does not overcome

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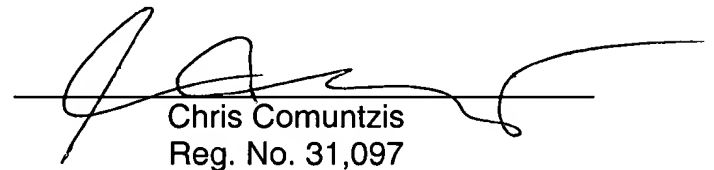
the deficiencies noted above with respect to Smith et al. Accordingly, claims 16-18 are also believed to patentably define over the combination of references for the same reasons given above with respect to independent claim 11.

Therefore, in view of the above amendments and remarks, it is respectfully requested that the application be reconsidered and that all of claims 11-19, now standing in the application, be allowed and that the case be passed to issue. If there are any other issues remaining which the Examiner believes could be resolved through either a supplemental response or an Examiner's amendment, the Examiner is respectfully requested to contact the undersigned at the local telephone exchange indicated below.

Respectfully submitted,

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